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SOURCE Newspapers as indicated.

ALGERIAN MOSLEM CULT QUESTION UNRESOLVED:
APPEALS BY COMMUNISTS

Comment: The Commission du Culte Musulman (Committee on the Moslem Cult) of the Algerian Assembly was formed on 29 November 1951 to study the problem of the separation of Islam from the state in Algeria. But by the time of the opening of the third 1952 session of the assembly on 18 November 1952, there was a rift in the committee over the issue of which aspects of the problem to cope with first.

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The following information, taken from Algiers daily and weekly newspapers published between 24 April and 18 December 1952, is based on the nationalists' reaction to the ensuing delay, as well as recent Communist press articles purporting to promote the independence of Islam.

Numbers in parentheses refer to appended sources.7

Dissension in Committee, Resignations, Published Protests

According to the Algiers pro-Communist daily newspaper Alger Republicain of 3 December 1952, on 2 December the Commission du Culte Musulman met to consider a report which had been drafted after the committee had heard various delegations of citizens during the preceding months. According to the source, the committee studied the question of organization of the Moslem cult and adopted several articles of the report.(1) On 4 December, Alger Republicain published the following follow-up report, which is given here in summarized form.

At the next meeting, on 3 December, it was proposed to take up at once the nomination of muftis and other Moslem officers, despite the fact that it had been voted previously to postpone consideration of the matter. The proposal is said to have led to violent disagreement and to the resignation from the committee, in protest, of Dr Gadi /progressive independent/;

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Ferroukhi, MTL (Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Democratiques, Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties); and Dr Benkhelil, UDMA (Union Democratique du Manifeste Algerien, Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto). Justrabo, PCA (Parti Communiste Algerien, Algerian Communist Party), although unable to attend this meeting because of his duties as mayor of Sidi Bel Abbas, has protested at an earlier meeting against the dilatory tactics of certain members of the committee. The Algerian Assembly's leadership is trying to hush up the committee's proceedings. (2)

Dr Cadi was later quoted by N. Z. [unidentified] in the 5 December issue of Alger Republicain as having stated that although the committee had been formed to discuss and prepare a plan for the separation of Islam and the state, certain members has decided to set aside this primary task in order to choose their favorites and those of the administration for the positions of muftis, imams, etc., which were vacant at the time. It was his denunciation of this "maneuver," Dr Cadi was quoted as saying by the 5 December issue of Alger Republicain, that had led to a heated argument. He gave further, according to N. Z., the following details about the meeting, reported below in summarized form.

Delegate Valleur reintroduced a resolution (dating back to 1949), which called for immediate nominations and which had continually cropped up and been threshed out at the infrequent meetings of the committee for over a year. Each time, the issue had served to block the committee's more urgent work. I challenged Valleur's right to speak in the name of the Moslems in Tlemcen.

Moreover, the committee committed a flagrant injustice when it decided to give no consideration at all to the UDMA plan which I sought to introduce. The committee has even decided to have my objections stricken from the minutes of the meeting, and I have received anonymous threatening letters; but nothing will deter me for a second in this struggle to free the Moslem cult from all interference, a struggle shared by Ferroukhi, Justrabo, and Benkhelil, my colleagues. (3)

According to Alger Republicain of 6 December, Ferroukhi stated that although he had not been present at the last meeting of the committee, he was entirely in accord with the statement made by Dr Cadi to the newspaper, especially since Djilani and Demaghatrou, his MTL colleagues, were present and protested against the censorship of Dr Cadi's objections. Ferroukhi's statement to the newspaper continued as follows (summarized):

In June 1952, the forthcoming holy season of Ramadan was used as a pretext by those urging the nomination of Moslem officials. They argued that the vacancies then existing would seriously hamper the religious rites in several mosques. Actually, that was only a stratagem to cheat the Moslems.

On the other hand, the administration has not yet given evidence of any action on an important motion approved by the committee on 14 December 1951. This motion requested that the administration furnish the committee with an inventory of the habous [religious endowment] property, both before the time of its sequestration and incorporation into the public domain, and from that time until the present. The committee needed this inventory to determine the cult's material independence; it should not have proceeded to examine any other matter until it has these documents of prime concern.

Once and for all, the role of the Algerian Assembly in bringing about the separation of Islam and the state must be derided. When the French law of 1905 [concerning separation of church and state] was passed, and when the decree of 1907 made the law applicable to the non-Moslem religions in Algeria, neither the French Parliament nor a territorial assembly in Algeria had to

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legislate on the operational principles and methods of the Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish faiths. For that reason, all that the assembly has to do now is to declare the Moslem cult independent; the right to determine the methods of observance of the Moslem faith belongs to the Moslem community itself. Any other viewpoint is contrary to the principles of Islam and even to the principle of separation of church and state. (4)

Dr Benkheilil permitted Alger Republicain to publish the following letter of resignation (given here in summarized form) which he had sent to the committee, following the dissension during the recent meetings.

I protested, on 12 June 1952, against the committee's taking up the matter of the Algerian Wakfs [religious property] in Palestine, which subject, though previously scheduled, was still not germane to the principal purpose for which the committee was formed. The answer given me was that a number of members had requested that the question of separation of church and state be postponed until after the Ramadan. The meeting was adjourned anyway because of the lack of a quorum.

On 14 June, I was surprised to read in the press that on the 13th, a last-minute announcement had been made about an afternoon meeting and that only six members had been present, including the chairman, and Mesbah, the rapporteur. The majority there had decided to use the draft of delegate Mesbah's report as the basis for future discussion, without further consideration of the UDMA proposal and without first notifying its proponents. This was done despite the fact that the UDMA proposal was the only one that had been placed before the Algerian Assembly and officially admitted during the past 2 years. Any other proposal, until offered by a delegate and recognized by the assembly, can be used only as information to assist the committee.

Dr Cadi's protest that the committee's proceedings were out of order was ignored. So was my own protest at the meeting of 27 November, when I offered to read and explain the UDMA draft. Such actions are anything but democratic. Furthermore, since the Moslem question is such a delicate one, a complete consideration of all the proposals set forth would best enable the committee to ponder the matter and fulfill its responsibility. But the opposition of the committee's chairman [Chergui] and the rapporteur to a full discussion leads me to conclude that an attempt is being made to put off one of the principal aspirations of the Algerian Moslems. (5)

Ulema Leader Charges Administration With Deliberate Delay

Larbi Tebessi, the vice-president of the Association des Oulamas d'Algerie (Association of Algerian Ulema), wrote an article for Alger Republicain on 10 December 1952, in which he purported to show that in the Algerian Assembly, the Moslem question was a "case without a judge." He said in his article that the Moslems had fully expected that once the matter of separating Islam from the state had been officially entered on, it would be duly inscribed on the agenda of the assembly, but that, instead, neither Laquiere, its president, nor the Governor General of Algeria in their addresses officially opening the current session of the assembly had referred to the question. [The speeches of President Laquiere and Governor General Leonard before the Algerian Assembly, as reported on 19 November 1952 by L'Echo d'Alger, pro-French daily newspaper, contained no reference to the Moslem cult question.] Such silence, said Tebessi in the Alger Republicain article, made people wonder whether there would indeed be any new light shed on the religious question and whether both the rapporteur on the question and those who heard him had not finally become disillusioned on a subject which in Algeria "never seemed to go beyond the state of digression and promises."

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The remainder of Tebessi's article in Alger Republicain continued as follows (in summarized form):

The general uneasiness as to the meaning of the silence maintained on the question became more acute. Moreover, the assembly's minutes noted the amazement of Dr Cadi and others at this silence and the committee chairman's feeling that such amazement was unjustified because the report of delegate Mesbah was not ready yet; thus (the chairman claimed) it was unlikely that the cult question could be dealt with during the current assembly session.

It seems to us that an expression of amazement and the maintenance of interest in the matter are all that the administration will allow, as it continues to use illicit means to control the Moslem cult. We Moslems fail to see how the debate could have been put off during these past several years.

As for those who, together with Chergui, have consented to the delay, we would have them know that it constitutes a premeditated outrage on Islamic law, the places of worship, and the faithful who refuse to practice their religion under imams placed in office by the colonialists for their (the colonialists') own purposes. The politically controlled Islam of Algeria is no substitute for true Islam.

We believe the state has seized our mosques by force and taken over their control, acts which are more prejudicial to Islam than any act of violence. And anyone (such as an imam) given charge of a usurped object becomes an accessory; neither such a person nor the usurper is fit to represent Islam. Furthermore, in Islam, it is forbidden to ask the usurper for that which is usurped (in this case, the religious office) so as to profit from it. It is likewise forbidden for anyone to worship under such imams. The mosques are being filled only by Moslems with little discernment, who simply follow the custom and respond to anyone who calls them to prayer.

If Chergui and those like him were practicing Moslems, and if they had any concern for the maintenance of the traditional Koranic rites, they would surely not have been so patient with all the shilly-shallying nor permitted this unwonted deterioration of Islam's mosques, its wakfs, and its learning. It could have been so easy for them, when Chergui became chairman of the cult committee, to make the imams (both old and new) independent of the administration, i. e., so that the imams could not expect its subsidies, honors, or assistance. (Their salaries, however, would still be paid by the Algerian Assembly, which could certainly find the means to do so.) Such a stand (by Chergui and the others) would effectively separate from the state the cult, its agents, its imams, and its followers.

The benefits of French legislation, with all its humanitarian principles, still are denied to the Algerian Moslems. In 1947, the French Parliament delegated the question of religion, as well as many other matters, to the Algerian Assembly by means of the Statute of Algeria. Even though the Algerian Assembly were capable of settling such matters (as its program seems to indicate), it would still be more appropriate for the French Parliament to legislate in the first place, since it is more inclined than the Algerian Assembly to put an end to injustice and to assure the victory of the oppressed. But the fact remains that the Cherguis are in the assembly, and it is their responsibility to complete their task.

Thus, neither the French Parliament, its legislation, nor the Algerian Assembly (with its legislation designed to confuse the religious question and serve the colonialists' interests) can be considered as judges for the case at hand, and it is indeed a case without a judge (6).

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Alger Republicain reported on 11 December that the Commission du Culte Musulman had decided to turn the matter of appointments to the various religious offices over to the council of the Union Generale des Comites Culturels (General Union of Cultural Committees), with the proviso that the council's list of candidates be first approved by the Governor General. (7)

Communists See Committee's Work Undermined by the Colonialists

The 11 December issue of Liberte, weekly organ of the PCA, reproduced the minutes of the Politburo of the PCA which has met on 8 December to discuss, among other matters, the activities of the Commission du Culte Musulman. The minutes stated, according to Liberte, that the Politburo "denounces the colonialists' attempts to sabotage both the work of the committee and the effective separation of the Moslem cult from the administration." According to the minutes reproduced by Liberte, the popular masses ought to demonstrate their will to see the Moslem cult treated like the other cults by sending protests to the committee and the assembly president. (8)

On 18 December, Liberte reiterated its demand for the freedom of Islam. An article by Hamou Kraba in this issue of the newspaper reminded the readers that it was the pressure by the FADRL (Front Algerien pour la Defense et le Respect de la Liberte, Algerian Front for the Defense and the Respect of Liberty) which had forced the Algerian Assembly to consider the problem, but that the colonialists were still maneuvering to delay a full discussion, both in the assembly and in the committee. The readers were also warned by Liberte that the veteran colonialists like Valleur and delegates like Lakhdari were trying to keep the status quo while they pretended to be occupied with filling cult offices and while Mesbah was entrusted with camouflaging their scorn by presenting his proposal. Strong protests, the Liberte article stated, were being raised on all sides by all worthy Algerians "indignant at this never-ending, flagrant meddling by the administration." (9)

Communist Press Articles Point Out Moslem Freedom in USSR, Albania

In various articles appearing in the 24 April, 23 October, and 4 December 1952 issues of Liberte, the PCA purported to show that the Moslems enjoy religious freedom in Communist countries such as the USSR and Albania. The Communists also "reprinted" a direct appeal from Stalin to the Moslems, issued in 1917.

In an article written "exclusively for Liberte," Hafiz Moussa Hadj Ali, the religious leader of the Moslems in Albania, declared that the Albanian Constitution has provided for the following: freedom of conscience and religion for all citizens, freedom to perform religious rites, both privately and publicly, prohibition of misuse of a church or religion for political purposes, prohibition of political organizations based on religion, and material aid by the state for religious communities. He stated in the Liberte article that these provisions have been implemented by a series of laws, one of which in particular assures the Moslems of increased financial aid, which has proved to be ample enough (amounting currently to millions of leks). He said further in Liberte that the faithful, urged by their leaders, participate in social meetings and consequently take a greater interest in supporting the government's decrees. The General Medrese (religious school), he affirmed in his Liberte article, enjoys the same privileges as other schools, being subsidized by the state, and directing its own program without state control. In conclusion, he said that all devout Albanian Moslems are cognizant of their duty to help the state in attaining its socialist goals, in strengthening the ties with other People's Democracies, especially the USSR, and in defending peace and freedom in the world. (10)

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Liberte reported on 23 October 1952 that on the occasion of a visit by an Algerian labor delegation to the USSR, the delegation's leader had received a statement on 1 October from Hadj Ichane Baba Khan Ibn Abdoulmadjid Khan, the Grand Mufti of the Moslems of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. The newspaper said that the 93-year-old Grand Mufti is a personal friend of King Ibn Saud and that the king has received him as the representative of the Soviet Moslems. Liberte went on to say that the Algerian Moslems, who see daily how the administration "flouts" the principle of the freedom of Islam, would read the Mufti's message with interest and would find in it an added incentive for their own struggle to free their cult.

In his signed statement, quoted by Liberte, the Grand Mufti indicated that Article 124 of the USSR Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and thought and provides that religious groups have control of their own buildings and organizations, with the state refraining from any interference in matters of religion. Thus, he said the mosques are open and are used by the faithful, just as is the case with the other religions (11)

Writing in the 4 December 1952 issue of Liberte, Mohamed Khelifa Belaid, a member of the Algerian labor delegation, quoted the Grand Mufti as saying that it is a calumny against Uzbekistan and the Soviet Union to deny that religion is free there. The writer also quoted him in the paper as stating that the Soviet Moslems are fully satisfied with the Communist regime because of the complete religious freedom it has granted them.

Mohamed Khelifa Belaid added in his article in Liberte that he personally had ascertained that religion is absolutely free in the USSR. With regard to the Soviet Moslems, he wrote in the paper that they themselves select each mufti at meetings held in the large centers every 3 or 5 years, and that these officials are salaried from the mosque funds maintained mostly by donations. In addition, he stated the Moslems elect, along with each mufti, an advisory council and a presidium for the council, and these bodies are in charge of regulating the cult's interests and relations with the state.

To build a new mosque, said Belaid in Liberte, all that is necessary is for a minimum of 20 persons to express this desire to the Soviet authorities, who will then furnish them with the premises needed for the "normal exercise of their faith." In the same article, he gave the total number of mosques in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, as 17 with 21 others in the area around Tashkent. He also mentioned an important medersa at Boukhara (12).

The same issue of Liberte also carried what was purported to be a proclamation "to all the Moslem workers of Russia and the East," over the names of Stalin and Lenin, and dated 3 December 1917. The portions of the proclamation which might be interpreted as applicable to the Moslem religious situation in Algeria follow here in summarized form.

The only desire of the working people of Russia is to secure an honest peace and to help the world's oppressed peoples to obtain their freedom. All the workers of the West and East have joined this struggle. Now we speak to you, the disinherited Moslem workers of Russia and the Orient, and to all others whose mosques, beliefs, and traditions have been destroyed or trampled on by the Russian Czar. Henceforth, your traditions and institutions are declared free and inviolable.

To you, Moslems of the East, whose life, possessions, and countries have long been hartered by the European pirates, we declare that the Council of People's Commissars is opposed to the annexation of foreign territories.

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The threat of servitude comes to you not from Russia and its revolutionary government but from the pirates of European imperialism, from those who have made colonies of your countries, plundered them, and bled them white. Turn them back! You can no longer remain silent when the whole is inflamed with indignation against the imperialist usurpers, and each spark of revolt is kindled into a powerful flame of revolution. You are the rightful masters of your countries; it is your right to arrange your lives as you see fit.

In this march toward a world-wide renovation, we await your sympathy and support. (12)

SOURCES

1. Alger Republicain, 3 Dec 52
2. Ibid., 4 Dec 52
3. Ibid., 5 Dec 52
4. Ibid., 6 Dec 52
5. Ibid., 8 Dec 52
6. Ibid., 10 Dec 52
7. Ibid., 11 Dec 52
8. Liberte, 11 Dec 52
9. Ibid., 18 Dec 52
10. Ibid., 24 Apr 52
11. Ibid., 23 Oct 52
12. Ibid., 4 Dec 52

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